

GAUDAPADA'S KARIKA COMPARED TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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Sri Gaudapada, spiritual teacher of Sri Sankaracharya, wrote a Karika in the early 8th century A.D. It was meant to provide a systematic and rational exposition of the main teachings of the Upanisads. It argues for the doctrine of non-dualism, which basically states that reality is non-dual (the Indian philosophers hesitated to use the term "monism" since they thought that reality can only be talked of via negative). It must be remembered that salvation or liberation in Hinduism is chiefly from the cycle of rebirth; that is one reason why the Christian term "born again" might not be preliminarily understood by certain Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists – since, for them salvation is a liberation from the bondage of being reborn again and again.

In the Karika, however, there is nothing like emancipation from physical rebirth. In fact, all such phenomenal concepts of birth or rebirth are denied as false. Liberation or salvation is synonymous with a renunciation of the empirical outlook and the scientific postulate of causality through realization of the truth of non-dualism. Liberation is not the achievement of physical freedom from the chain of cyclical time, but is the mental realization of empirical negation; in other words of all subject-object, cause-effect differentiations (i.e. of non-dualism).

Everything seems to be born because of the empirical outlook; therefore there is nothing that is eternal (IV.57).

As long as there is mental preoccupation with causality, so long does the worldly state continue.... (IV.56).

There is no dissolution, no origination, none in bondage, none striving or aspiring for salvation, and none liberated. This is the highest truth (II.32).

That highest Bliss is located in one's own Self. It is quiescent, coexistent with liberation, beyond description, and birthless.... (III.47).

Two chief arguments are as follows (for details please consult my online manuscript Epistemics of Divine Reality, pp. 73-84):

1. Argument from Dream: As objects in dream state can't be discerned as false, so can objects in the waking state not be discerned as false (Whatever be the arguments, one can't escape the box of idealism) – Mandukya Upanisad speaks of four states of consciousness: dreaming, waking, dreamless sleep, and pure consciousness (without subject-object differentiations).

2. Argument from Being: Being cannot come into existence (for it already is), neither can non-being come into existence (for what is not cannot be); therefore, being is eternal. Applying the Cartesian principal of doubt here, only the non-dual (indubitable) Self exists, and its perception of all plurality and causal phenomena is false, in the rational sense.

To solve the problem of “causality” (though it is denied in the purest sense) as to how the Self “comes” to be self-deluded, the doctrine of Maya is introduced. Maya is similar to magic, which also means that it “has no reality” (IV.58); therefore, the empirical phenomena it “produces” are also as unreal (as in magic). In fact, in the absolute sense, it does not produce anything – this is only an accommodative explanation; for where an explanation is anticipated, a duality of subject-object is already presupposed; therefore, the answer uses empirical analogies. There is nothing like personal salvation, since “persons” don’t exist; and, there is nothing like the salvation of Brahman (Being), since Brahman can’t be liberated from anything – for It alone exists, then from what would it be delivered; secondly, it is immutable. Therefore, apologists are wrong when they contend that liberation of one individual should mean the liberation of Brahman (cf. Vishal Mangalwadi, *World of Gurus*).

Obviously, this is too far from common-sense realism and from the practicability of life. Therefore, the Karika confesses:

Instruction about creation has been imparted
by the wise for the sake of those who, from the
facts of experience and adequate behavior,
vouch for the existence of substantiality, and
who are ever afraid of the birthless entity
(IV.42).

The doctrine of creation and dissolution in popular Vedic religion, however, is not considered to be untrue; it is only relatively true and has its function within the practical game of phenomenal religious life. This is where the Vedic deities in all their empirical plurality, diversification, attributes, and finitudes blend with the realm of humans, animals, and demons. This is the world of causality, naturality, plurality, modality, and immanence. In other words, this is the world of Maya.

Thus, the paradoxical doctrines of non-dualism and pluralism are made parallel.

The Significance of Christian Theology as an Answer

1. It posits God as transcendent and yet immanent in relation to creation – thus, eliminating the ontological problem of being and causality. He is always eternal and created the world out of nothing.

2. It posits God as infinite and yet limited in relation to creation – thus, eliminating the need of a misty doctrine of Maya.
3. It posits God as One and yet a Trinity – thus, eliminating the epistemic problem of rational and empirical truth-conflict. In the non-dualist concept, truth is objectively impossible since the object doesn't exist as different, while the doctrine of Trinity teaches an eternal subject-object relationship within the God-head. This also eliminates the didactic problem of lesser truths or a need for folk theology.

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